

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 L-02 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 ACDA-05 SAJ-01

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1328

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB/QCZCLDNRIO.#

SUBJECT: BOYD, LEADING MODERATE, WINS ELECTION FOR
ENGINEERING UNION'S SECOND POST

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. JOHN BOYD, 57, A LEADER OF RIGHT-WING FORCES IN BRITAIN'S SECOND LARGEST UNION, THE AMALGAMATED UNION OF ENGINEERING WORKERS (AUEW), WAS

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OVERWHELMINGLY ELECTED, AFTER A POSTAL BALLOT, TO THE

UNION'S SECOND MOST IMPORTANT POST - GENERAL SECRETARY. HE DEFEATED THE CANDIDATE OF THE COMBINED LEFT - BOB WRIGHT - BY A VOTE OF 164,276 AGAINST 96,216. THE KEY POST IN THE UNION REMAINS, HOWEVER, IN THE HANDS OF ITS LEFT-WING PRESIDENT, HUGH SCANLON. MOREOVER, THE ELECTION OF THE MODERATES IS MARRED BY THE FACT THAT SCANLON, AFTER A TIE VOTE ON THE UNION'S EXECUTIVE, CAST A DECISIVE VOTE WHICH ELIMINATED THE POSTAL BALLOT--AN ELECTORAL DEVICE WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO THE BOYD VICTORY AND WHICH THE MODERATES HAD BEEN COUNTING ON TO ASSIST THEIR CAUSE IN FUTURE UNION ELECTIONS. THE AUEW DECISION TO ELIMINATE THE POSTAL BALLOT IS BEING APPEALED AND THERE ARE ALSO MOVES IN THE PARLIAMENT, SUPPORTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, FOR LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD HELP SUBSIDIZE THE POSTAL BALLOT IN UNION ELECTIONS. (ELECTIONS AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCES OF OTHER TUC AFFILIATES THUS FAR HELD THIS YEAR HAVE RESULTED IN SOME GAINS FOR MODERATES, BUT THESE HAVE BEEN LIMITED.) END SUMMARY.

2. BOYD'S VICTORY IS IMPORTANT BUT BY NO MEANS DECISIVE, SINCE THE MOST IMPORTANT POWER CENTER OF THE UNION RESIDES IN THE PRESIDENCY. HOWEVER, HE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY OF THE ENGINEERING UNION WHICH INCLUDES SUPERVISION OF THE STAFF AND WILL

ORGAN OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE RANK AND FILE. BOYD WILL CONTINUE TO GIVE LEADERSHIP TO MODERATE FORCES IN THE UNION. HE IS A CANNY SCOTSMAN, CLOSE TO THE RANK AND FILE, AND HE FOUGHT A SHREWD CAMPAIGN BUT EVEN SOME OF HIS MAJOR SUPPORTERS ARE SENSITIVE ABOUT HIS LIMITATIONS, INCLUDING A TENDENCY TO ALIENATE SOME OF HIS FELLOW MODERATES. HOWEVER, IN TAKING OVER THE GENERAL SECRETARY'S FUNCTION, HE WILL BE GIVING UP HIS FORMER POST AS MEMBER OF THE AUEW EXECUTIVE--WHICH IS TIGHTLY BALANCED BETWEEN THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT--AND THUS LOSE THE RIGHT TO VOTE ON MANY CRITICAL UNION DECISIONS.

3. IT IS AT THIS POINT THAT THE POSTAL BALLOT BECOMES IMPORTANT, SINCE BY ITS ELIMINATION, THE UNION WILL RETURN TO THE OLD SYSTEM OF BRANCH (LOCAL) ELECTIONS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHICH WERE FREQUENTLY CHARACTERIZED BY VERY LOW TURNOUTS BY THE RANK AND FILE AND HIGH PARTICIPATION BY COMMUNISTS AND OTHER EXTREME LEFT-WINGERS. POSTAL BALLOTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, TEND TO MITIGATE THE NORMAL APATHY OF THE RANK AND FILE, WHICH HAS OFTEN BEEN MODERATE, SINCE THE POLLING BOOTH IS NO FURTHER AWAY THAN THE NEAREST MAIL-BOX. UNLESS THE POSTAL BALLOT IS RESTORED--AND AN APPEAL AGAINST ITS ELIMINATION WILL SHORTLY BE HEARD BY

THE UNION'S EXECUTIVE--MODERATE PROSPECTS OF CAPTURING
OTHER UNION POSTS IN SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS MAY BE
UNDERMINED.

4. WHAT SO INFURIATED THE MODERATES IS THAT THE RECENT
RULES REVISION CONFERENCE OF THE UNION HAD FIRST RE-
AFFIRMED THE USE OF THE POSTAL BALLOT BY A NARROW VOTE
OF 27-25, BUT TWO OF THE MODERATES WHO CONTRIBUTED TO
THIS CLOSE VOTE WERE DISQUALIFIED ON A TECHNICALITY,
AND THE VOTE BECAME 25-25, THUS THROWING THE ISSUE TO THE
EXECUTIVE WHICH THEN SPLIT 3-3 AND RESULTED IN SCANLON'S
CASTING THE TIE-BREAKING VOTE TO DISCONTINUE THE POSTAL
BALLOT. BOYD DESCRIBED THE DISQUALIFICATION AS "IR-
REGULAR AND SINISTER" AND SOME MODERATES THREATENED TO

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TAKE THE MATTER TO THE HIGH COURT. SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, AS A RESULT OF THE FUROR OVER THE DECISION, THE EXECUTIVE HAS AGREED TO TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MATTER SHORTLY. SCANLON IS LIKELY AGAIN TO HOLD THE CASTING VOTE ON THE MATTER. AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS A MOVEMENT IN THE PARLIAMENT TO AMEND PENDING LEGISLATION (EMPLOYMENT PROTEC-
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TION BILL) TO ALLOW FOR GOVERNMENT FINANCING OF POSTAL BALLOTS BY UNION. POSTAL BALLOTS ARE COSTLY, AND AUEW LEFT-WINGERS HAVE ARGUED THAT THE UNION CANNOT AFFORD THEM. GOVERNMENT FUNDING WOULD CERTAINLY ELIMINATE THAT ARGUMENT AND PERHAPS CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE WIDESPREAD USE OF THE DEVICE IN UNION ELECTIONS. IF, AS SEEMS TO BE THE CASE IN THE AUEW, THE MODERATE CAUSE IS ENHANCED BY SUCH USE, ITS EXTENSION TO OTHER UNIONS WILL BE WEL-COME BY MODERATES THROUGHOUT THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. FOR THE MOMENT, THE ISSUE IS IN SUSPENSION.

5. COMMENT. WHILE BOYD'S VICTORY SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED -- AND HE HAS PROMISED TO USE HIS NEW OFFICE AGGRESSIVELY -- IT WOULD BE PREMATURE TO SUGGEST THAT THE BIG, SPRAWLING ENGINEERING UNION IS MAKING A SHARP TURN TO THE RIGHT. OVERALL, THE UNION IS SAID TO BE SPLIT IN TWO BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND LEFT WINGS, BUT THE AUEW IS REALLY FOUR UNIONS IN ONE--CONSISTING OF A LARGE ENGINEERING SECTION AND THREE MUCH SMALLER GROUPS WITH SEMI-AUTONOMOUS STRUCTURES--REPRESENTING FOUNDRY, DRAFTSMEN, AND TECHNICAL STAFF WORKERS. TWO OF THESE SMALLER SECTIONS ARE IN FACT LED BY COMMUNISTS, ONE OF WHOM IS KEN GILL, WHO WAS RECENTLY ELECTED TO THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL. EFFORTS TO UNIFY THESE SECTIONS TO CREATE A MORE UNIFIED UNION HAVE THUS FAR FAILED. PRESIDING OVER THIS ARRAY IS SCANLON HIMSELF, THE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL LEADER WITHIN THE AUEW. WHEN THE ELECTION TO FIND HIS SUCCESSOR IS HELD--IN 1978--THIS WILL BE THE MOST DECISIVE LEFT-RIGHT BATTLE, AND WE WILL THEN HAVE A TRUE IDEA WHETHER--AT LAST--THE MODERATES IN THE UNION HAVE TRULY RETURNED TO POWER.

RICHARDSON

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